



Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

Providing care for someone who is chronically ill or incapacitated can be very stressful. In our society, caregiving is often provided by a family member, and the overwhelming majority of caregivers are women. Whether young (ages 18-44), middle-aged (ages 45-64), or older (ages 65+), women may find themselves providing care for aging parents or an impaired spouse (or both) while raising their own children or grandchildren, holding a job, and managing a household. This leaves little room for a woman to maintain her own health; indeed, the strain that accompanies caregiving can result in poorer mental and physical fitness for a woman, threatening her health and well-being.

The 1997¹ California Women's Health Survey asked women: **"During the past 12 months, not counting work duties or normal child care, have you provided frequent care to someone?"** Other questions asked about smoking, alcohol use, weight, employment, trouble sleeping, wanting to seek help from a mental health professional, and availability of help with everyday tasks, finances, personal illness, or transportation.

Overall, 25% of the women in the survey reported being caregivers. Middle-aged

women were most likely to be caregivers (32%), followed by older women (28%) and younger women (21%). A majority of young and middle-aged caregivers were employed (59% and 63%, respectively) as were 14% of older caregivers.

Compared with non-caregivers, caregivers of all ages smoked more (19% vs. 15%) and were more likely to be overweight, especially among older women (28% vs. 23%). Fewer caregivers (43%) had young children at home than non-caregivers (49%).

More caregivers than non-caregivers of all ages reported trouble sleeping (44% vs. 38%), feeling overwhelmed (20% vs. 15%), and wanting to seek help for personal or family problems (24% vs. 20%).

On the positive side, more caregivers than non-caregivers of all ages reported the availability of support with everyday tasks (88% vs. 83%), finances (85% vs. 82%), personal illness (93% vs. 90%), and transportation (96% vs. 93%). Similar levels of support were available for women in each group.

CAREGIVING AND HEALTH AMONG CALIFORNIA WOMEN, 1997¹

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¹ Information on caregiving from the 1997 California Women's Health Survey is presented here. These questions were not analyzed for inclusion in Issue #1 of Data Points and were not repeated in the 1998 survey.

Health Problems Among Female Caregivers
by Age, California, 1997

